

SAFETY SENSE

Easy Tips For Food Safety

(NAPSA)—Recently, two food safety scares occurred, with *E.coli* outbreaks tied to bagged spinach and a fast food chain; fortunately, you can still protect yourself and your family.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 76 million cases of food-borne disease occur each year in the United States. The great majority of these cases are mild and cause symptoms for only a day or two, but some cases are more serious, causing hospitalizations and even death. While America's food safety system is among the best in the world, you can take a number of modest and easy steps to help prevent the spread of disease:

The first step is to wash your hands (including between the fingers) in hot, soapy water for 20 seconds before and after preparing food, and after handling raw meat, poultry or fish. Experts estimate that washing hands often and thoroughly could eliminate nearly half the cases of food-borne illness.

The *E.coli* bacteria are found not only in meats, but also fruits and vegetables such as lettuce, sprouts, tomatoes, spinach and green onions. Therefore, fruits and vegetables—even prepackaged salads and melons—should be washed under cool running water. Cut produce should be promptly refrigerated.

In addition to washing your hands and the actual food products, it is crucial that you wash all food contact surfaces, such as cutting boards, countertops and uten-



sils, with soap and hot water after each use.

An excellent and effective way to sanitize countertops and other cooking surfaces is with a solution of water and plain, unscented, liquid chlorine bleach. Nonporous surfaces, such as tile, metal and hard plastics, should be sanitized in a solution consisting of 1 tablespoon liquid bleach per gallon of water. Porous surfaces, including wood, rubber or soft plastics, should be sanitized with a solution comprising 3 tablespoons of liquid bleach per gallon of water. Both types of surfaces should be kept wet and allowed to air dry to maximize the effect of sanitization.

Sponges, dishcloths and dish towels should also be soaked for two minutes in a disinfecting solution of 1 to 3 tablespoons of bleach per gallon of water.

Following these simple food handling and storage steps will help prevent food-borne illnesses from affecting you and your loved ones. For more information, visit <http://www.ific.org/publications/other/consumersguideom.cfm>.